

COMMERCIALIZATION OF HOLIDAYS IN THE PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS - FORM OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN TOURISM

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Abstract

Sustainable development of tourism in the protected areas should be regarded as a continuous improvement process in the management quality of the protected natural areas that are included in the tourist circuit as well as of the ecological tourism products, merchandised by the travel agencies. In Romania, the best-represented types of protected natural areas are the biosphere reservations, our country having three of these areas, followed by 13 national parks and 14 natural parks. The total surface of the protected areas in Romania is of approximately 1.9 million hectares, which represents almost 8% from the total surface of the country. Regarding the structure, we notice the typological diversity and the alignment to the international standards and IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) category system. The fieldwork done at the 2009 (March 19th – 22nd) Romanian Tourism Fair has shown the fact that, even if they recognize the benefits of the vacations in protected areas, the travel agencies' preoccupations of creating specialized packages have been reduced, displaying a poor offer, or a special offer created at the tourists' request. The research was realized within the project called "Dynamics of the implementation of community policies in the valuing of the Romanian protected areas through tourism and designing architecture of integrated management for them". Consequently, considering, on the one hand, the advantages of the vacations in protected areas and, on the other hand, the tourists' increasing interest towards this type of vacation is necessary in the future, a more intense involvement of the travel agencies, but also of the protected natural areas administrations in their promotion, fructification and sustainable development.

Keywords: natural protected areas, management, sustainable development, commercialization of tourist products, tourism agencies

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Introduction

The contemporary evolution of the global economy, the changes in the social life have imposed the sustainable development as a vision of the progress that integrates the immediate and, on the long term, the global and local needs and regards of the social, economic and environmental requirements as inseparable and codependent elements of the human evolution. The sustainable development promotes the idea of a balance between economic growth, social equity, rational use of resources and environment preservation. The key element of sustainable development is the reconciliation between the social-economic dynamics and the environment quality, and, consequently, the promotion of an integrated process of decision-elaboration and decision-making at a global, regional, national or local level. Tourism, one of the most dynamic domains of the contemporary economy, has to be equally integrated in the sustainable development process, since, through its complex content, it can help attain a stable balance between the three major dimensions of evolution – environmental, economic and social-cultural, thus insuring its long term sustainability.

1. The particularities of sustainable development in tourism

The promotion of a sustainable tourism is conditioned by the major changes in the economic growth models by concentrating on the intensive types, by shifting the emphasis towards the branches that are consuming less material resources, which are not renewable, towards globalization and integration.

The request for sustainable and environmentally friendly practices has been intensifying since the 80s based on correlated processes, which materialized in the western societies on the long term. The concept of sustainability was brought into tourism from the sustainable development ideology, which followed the publication of the “Brundtland” Commission Report in 1987 called “Our Common Future” (Saarinen, J., 2006, p.1126). There have been academic and political debates over the sustainability concept, before the “Brundtland” Report (Gossling, S. & Hall, M., 2005, p.25), but, along with the elaboration of this report, sustainability became the main theme of the political macroeconomic approaches in all the domains of activity, including in tourism.

The most common definition of sustainable development is still the one elaborated in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), respectively “the process that satisfies the needs of the current generations without bringing prejudices to the interests of the future generations” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

"Sustainability as a principle is characterised by the interplay of three dimensions: ecology, economy and social. The ecological dimension of sustainability is given preference in connection to the behaviour of consumers. Economic development and welfare are only possible in the long-term within a predetermined framework that identifies nature as the foundation of life. Conversely economic and social aspects also serve for the "do ability" of ecology: ecological production and consumerism can only be realised if they are attainable for the consumer and when consumerism and production take place under acceptable social conditions (Enquete Commission, 2009. p. 381)

Essentially, sustainable development represents ensuring a better life for all the people, in a viable manner, for the present, as well as for the future. In this context, sustainable development is based on the principles of wise administration of world resources, on the equity in the use of these resources and the way of distributing the obtained benefits. The concept has evolved since the 1987 definition, notably due to Agenda 21, an action plan that emerged from the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (Rio, 1992) and from the implementation plan of the Sustainable Development Summit (Johannesburg, 2002). Three dimensions of sustainable development are now recognized and emphasized: - Economic sustainability, which is generating prosperity at different levels of society and implementing cost efficiency in all the economic activities. Essentially, it is represented by the viability of companies and activities, as well as by their ability to function on the long term; - Social sustainability, which represents respect for human rights and equal opportunities for all the members of society; it presupposes an equitable distribution of the benefits with the purpose of improving poverty. The emphasis lies on the local communities, on maintaining and reinforcing their systems of life, on recognizing and respecting the different cultures and avoiding any form of exploitation; - Environment sustainability—means to preserve and manage the resources, especially the non-renewable ones. Actions are required to minimize air, earth and water pollution, as well as to preserve the biodiversity and the natural heritage.

It is important to mention that these three dimensions are interdependent, because accomplishing a sustainable development presupposes maintaining a balance between them. Moreover, the sustainable development process implies respecting three fundamental principles: perspective, equity and holism (Redcliffe, M. & G. Woodgate, 1997, p.61). The need for sustainability manifested in the domain of tourism as well, as a result of the awareness and preoccupation for its impact especially on the environment (Holden, A., 2003, p.98). In accordance with the evolution of the sustainable development ideology, the transformations within the tourist processes of production and consumption have determined alternative orientations crystallized into new forms and concepts, such as ecotourism. Consequently, markets have been created for the “environmentally friendly” products. (Hughes, G., 2004, p.412). On the one hand, sustainable development in tourism can be considered a negotiation process of the interests of the main stakeholders involved in tourism: tourists, local communities, industry and the environment (Hughes, G., 2002, p.458). On the other hand, tourism has an immense power to do good and, still, it can be a vector of pressures that can destroy the goods on which it is based. If it develops without the awareness of sustainability, tourism can severely deteriorate not only the society, but also the environment as well as itself.

To sum up, *sustainable tourism can be defined as being the tourism that is deeply aware of the present and future economic, social and environmental impact, which corresponds to the needs of the visitors, industry, environment and local communities.* Accomplishing sustainable tourism means taking these effects and needs into consideration in its planning and development. Furthermore, tourism should be regarded as a continuous improvement process, which applies equally to tourism in cities, resorts, rural and coastal areas, mountains and protected areas, in short, to all forms of tourism.

Sustainable tourism presupposes the *achievement of a global and integrated approach.* Therefore, along with other activities, it has to be considered a part of the communities' sustainable development, being necessary to take into consideration its impact on other

sectors, in what regards the competition for the use of resources and mutual support (Hunter, C., 2004, p.21). The excessive dependency of an economy or a society on tourism must be avoided. A global and integrated approach also presupposes understanding the relations within the tourism sector, as well as the way in which the public policies can influence tourism or can be influenced by it.

Concurrently, sustainable tourism entails the *involvement of all the stakeholders*, undertaking certain responsibilities at an individual level, but also teamwork, and, not least, the coordination at the level of a territorial unit (Hardy, A., 2005, p.106). The tourism stakeholders must have the possibility to influence its management and development, through formal partnerships and agreements, as well as through the reinforcement and use of the local structures.

The management of the impact at local and global level represents another characteristic of sustainable tourism. It is easier to determine the impact on the environment, on the economic and socio-cultural background of the local communities, of the destinations and, correspondingly, it allows an adequate elaboration of the policies in the domain. However, sustainable tourism must pay the same attention to the global impact, whose effect is pollution in tourism (greenhouse gas emissions) and the exhaustion of the non-renewable resources, with a direct effect on tourism (climate changes) (Duim R. & Caalders, J., 2002, p.746).

Sustainable tourism highlights the *mutual dependency between sustainability and quality*. It is necessary to accept the fact that qualitative tourist products and destinations are those that respect the requirements of sustainable development, not the ones that concentrate only on the visitors' satisfaction. This way, the tourists are encouraged to think in the same terms – a place where the environment is protected is a place that, in its turn, protects them (Yunis, E, 2006, p.19).

Consequently, we should promote the actions by which the same result is reached in a positive manner, with less negative effects on the resource: these actions are the *functional alternatives* (Deman, R., 2005). For instance, within the improvement of the visitors' degree of satisfaction strategy concerned in creating new recreational opportunities, the options with the lowest environmental and social impact and with the highest benefits are preferable.

The promptness and ability in *limiting the development of tourism* and of the tourist flows from a destination are essential features of the sustainable tourism concept (Saarinen, J., 2006). The barrier-factors could be: the ecological frailty, capacity of resources, the communities' preoccupations, visitors' satisfaction, etc. It is necessary to use these factors to set some *limits* that have to be respected by all the interested people, *with the purpose of minimizing the negative impact, rational use of resources and achieving an integrated waste management*.

The adaptability of reactions and management represents another major feature of the tourism sustainable development. Tourism is sensitive to the external conditions in what regards performances and impact level; the global threats, such as climate changes and terrorism, have to be taken into account in the tourist planning and in the risk management policies. Efficient tourism management requires, in due time, the available record of the changes caused by the impact, to make possible the adjustment of policies and actions.

Sustainable tourism *ensures social equity*. Thus, it has to be a guarantee of equity in the correct distribution of benefits and costs between the promoters of this sector, the host populations and their areas (Tourism Sustainability Group, 2007). The tourist activity has to be initiated with the means specific of the local communities, because these are the ones that maintain the control over the tourism activities.

Making the tourism sector sustainable presupposes *creating workplaces within the community and ensuring the local participation in planning and decision-making*. Tourism has to generate workplaces that lead to improvement in the life quality of the local communities and that attain a balance between the already existent economic activities in the area and the tourism activity.

Sustainable tourism presupposes *the development of the private sector* and, at the same time, *the implementation of the code of good practices and programs*. Consequently, it is necessary to elaborate a code of good practices at all levels: national, regional and local, based on already accepted international standards. Moreover, guidelines can be established for tourism operators, for monitoring the impact of the various tourism activities, as well as for the change limits for various areas. It is necessary to organize educational and training programs for the management improvement in the domain of the natural and cultural resources protection.

All these particularities show that sustainable tourism means the ability of the tourist destination to remain competitive, by maintaining the environment quality, despite all the problems, to attract new visitors, then to turn them into loyal customers, to remain unique from a cultural point of view and to be in a permanent balance with the environment.

2. Forms of sustainable tourism development

Given the condition of increase in international tourist flows, and, based on the pressure that tourism entails on the environment and on the socio-cultural background, a problem arises more and more. The problem of preserving the natural and cultural heritage can be solved based on rigorous long-term planning and it involves promoting some forms with a reduced impact on the environment such as the ecotourism, tourism in protected areas, rural tourism, cultural tourism, etc.

A form of materializing sustainable tourism is *ecotourism*, which has developed in the last decades of the 20th century because of the danger created by the overdevelopment of tourism. The ecotourism is a way of traveling, of spending the vacation, which consists in the person's visit, especially, to the attractive natural areas to relax, know, and inform oneself, without causing damages to the quality of the environment, bringing benefits to all the people involved in the tourist act. The term of ecotourism defines the tourism that respects the demands of sustainable development, which, on the one hand, is interested in nature, respects the culturally specific and necessities of the local communities. On the other hand, ecotourism has a minimal impact on the environment, entails a more reduced development of the infrastructure than the traditional forms of tourism and commits to bring benefits to the local population. The implementation of this type of tourism ensures the adequate exploitation of the tourist resources, according to the preservation of their ecological integrity (Nistoreanu, P., 2003, p.27).

Another component of the sustainable tourism is the *cultural tourism*, preoccupied with valuing a country or a region, especially with art and architecture. Generally, it focuses on the traditional communities that have a variety of customs, unique forms of art and distinctive social traditions, which fundamentally differ from other types/forms of culture. Cultural tourism can be considered a form of sustainable tourism because: it has a positive economic and social impact; it establishes and reinforces the identity of the communities; it helps preserve the cultural heritage and its correct interpretation, satisfy the visitors by offering authentic experiences and stimulates the income attainment from cultural goods (Weiler B., Hall C., 2003, p.25).

Rural tourism is the tourism where rural culture is a key-component of the recreational tourist product. The distinctive feature of the rural touristic products resides in the fact that the visitors are being offered personalized contacts, they enjoy the environment and human background of the rural area and, if possible, they take part in the activities, traditions and lifestyle of the local population (World Tourism Organization, 2001). Its characteristics: aiming to minimize the negative effects on the natural and cultural environment, optimizing the tourists' satisfaction and maximizing long-term economic growth of a region, exploiting the local tourist resources and the growth of the inhabitants' living standards, represent arguments that would include it within the category of the sustainable tourism forms.

Geotourism is a form of tourism that improves the geophysical features of a space – environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the inhabitants' wellbeing. (www.nationalgeographic.com). The purpose of geotourism is that the destinations would remain intact for the future generations, would preserve their resources, involve the local population, inform tourists and residents, contribute to the local communities' economic wellbeing, have their culture and traditions respected and is interested in the qualitative, and not quantitative aspect of the visitors. As in the case of ecotourism, it is considered that tourism income can be used in the promotion of the preservation concept – the development of the principle beyond “tourism in nature” to encompass culture and history: all values that confer character and value to a place.

Sustainable tourism development, through its practical forms conciliates interests and antagonistic objectives, favors the partnership and cooperation between deciders, operators and consumers and promotes the general long-term interest, beyond the particular, immediate one. What should be kept in mind is the fact that, the development of all the forms of tourism has to include the idea of sustainability, to respond to the sustainable development requests. In this context, ecotourism, tourism in protected areas, rural tourism, geotourism, cultural tourism, etc. can be considered the “avant-garde” of the sustainable tourism forms.

3. Traveling in protected areas—expression of the sustainable development in tourism

A particular place in the structure of sustainable tourism forms occupies the one in protected areas. Trips in these areas can be integrated in a wider category, *tourism in nature*, having, from this perspective, numerous common elements with ecotourism, rural tourism, green tourism, adventure tourism and others. Actually, the interdependency between these forms has caused that in many occasions and/or numerous authors approach them in a reverse manner by considering, correctly in our opinion, that ecotourism, rural tourism, green or adventure tourism are ways of spending a vacation in the protected areas.

Certainly, this vision can be accepted in relation to the delimited areas at the level of a protected area. As by definition they are gentle with the environment, with nature, these forms can be exercised with no reservations in the buffer or peripheral areas to the protected areas. The tourists' visits in the protected areas are determined by their desire to know nature, to live new experiences, originated by spending the spare time in this environment, to evade from the famous tourism areas/destinations and, thus, crowded and urbanized. Along with the growth of the tourists' experience and aggravation of the problems regarding environment protection and responsible use of the resources, other forms of spending a vacation appeared and crystallized, forms which are more environmentally friendly; also, tourists have become more aware of the necessity to protect the environment and more responsible, more involved in this sense (Minciu, R., 2009). The fundamental idea of constituting parks (protected areas) is that of preserving the resources for the benefit of the people; consequently, the essential issue in managing them is that of establishing the balance of the optimal report, between protection and valuing. This is the fundamental task of management in the protected areas, task understood in the context of the permanent dynamics of the phenomena (Minciu, R. & Hornoiu, R., 2009).

Tourism in the protected areas has a variety of motivations, extremely different from the ones of the other categories of tourists. As a result, the nature travels industry must be organized according to these motivations. In time there appeared four categories, of tourists who are mainly motivated by the idea of spending a vacation in nature (Minciu, R., 2009): *hard-core nature tourists*; *dedicated nature*; *mainstream nature tourists*; *casual nature*.

To these general motivations for the tourism in nature, we would add the ones specific to the protected areas, to the visitors of natural areas, often searching for loneliness and for wild life. The increased interest to visit natural areas and, especially protected areas is caused by the action of specific factors, by the manifestation of changes in the life of the population, in the consumption behavior. Among them, the following are worth mentioning: *growth of the educational level* and, simultaneously, of the *respect for nature, for cultural and civilization-related values*; *modification of the population structure on age based groups*; *increase in the duration of the spare time and changes in its distribution*; *income increase*; *the growth of the social and environmental preoccupations*. In the whole world, the population expresses, more and more intensely, the preoccupation with regard to social injustices and environmental problems. More and more acutely, it becomes necessary that the activities have a lower impact on the environment; people get more and more involved in supporting the preservation and development initiatives of the local communities. Moreover, there is a shift in the emphasis on the activities which consume less and less resources, with a diminished impact on the environment. All these lead to the enhancement of the interest for the crystallization of the preoccupations related to the protection and preservation of the natural and anthropologic environment. (Table no.1)

Table no. 1: Protected areas in the world in accordance with IUCN categories, 2008

IUCN management categories	Number	Percent (%)	Total surface (km ²)	Percent (%)
1a. Natural reserve	13.635	13	1.279.265	8
1b. Wild zone	4.867	5	1.224.392	7
2. National park	12.045	11	4.209.346	24
3. Natural monument	7.548	7	251.328	1
4. Area of habitat management	37.737	35	4.503.455	26
5. Sea-earth protected area	21.863	20	1.389.460	8
6. Protected area with resource management	10.305	9	4.389.328	26
TOTAL	108.000	100	17.246.574	100

Source: IUCN, 2008, *World Data Base on Protected Areas*, IUCN

Following these developments, worldwide, has increased the number and the surface of protected areas simultaneously with the development of specific policies and strategies. However, there was a change of attitude on the level of holidays makers - tour operators and travel agencies - in order to increase interest in knowing what the tourist requests are and therefore, for creating appropriate tourism products in protected areas.

Along with these general or particular tendencies, we can identify others, specific to every geographical area, country, region or type of habitat.

4. The organization of the national protected areas system

In connection with these evolutions and tendencies, in our country there has been a special interest for the designation of protected areas and the creation of a *unitary, integrated system*, as well as for the valuing of their potential through tourism. Beyond the rich, varied and complex potential, – demonstrated by the fact that for some resources Romania has an important rank on a global or continental level (mineral and thermal waters, large carnivores, cultural heritage) — our country has a rich experience in organizing protected areas, fact proven, among others, by the existence since 1930 of a law regarding environment protection and the fact that the National Park Retezat Mountains was created in 1935.

Presently, the total surface of the protected areas in our country is of approximately 1, 9 million hectares, which represents almost 8% from the total surface of the country and in 2013 it is supposed to reach the level of the European average (12%). Furthermore, regarding the structure, we notice the typological diversity and the alignment to the international standards and IUCN category system (Table no.2).

An increase in the number of the protected areas and of their surfaces can be noticed in time, more after 2002, as far as the evolution is concerned. The types that are best represented structurally are the biosphere reservations, our country having three such areas (the Danube Delta – 576 216 ha, Retezat - 38 138 ha and Pietrosul Mare - Rodna - 47304 ha.) followed by 13 national parks and 14 natural parks. Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that some of them have a special value, being recognized worldwide (the Danube Delta Biosphere Reservation), Retezat National Park and Piatra Craiului National Park.

Table no. 2: Natural protected areas in Romania

Protected areas categories	Categ. IUCN	Number		Surface	
		abs. val.	% from total Romania	(ha)	% from total surface Romania
Reservations of the Biosphere	-	3	0,22	664446	7,49
National Parks	II	13	0,96	315857	3,56
Natural Parks	V	14	1,03	737428	8,32
Scientific Reservations	I	79	5,84	100574	1,13
Natural Reservations	IV	671	49,48	136537	1,54
Natural Monuments	III	190	14,01	18220	0,21
Wet Lands	-	5	0,37	616571	6,96
Areas of special fauna protection	-	108	7,96	2992798	33,75
Sites of community importance	-	273	20,13	3284092	37,04
TOTAL		1356	100	8866523	100

Source: National Institute of Statistics, 2009, *Romanian Statistical Yearbook 2008*, Bucharest.

The concerns to create a national system for the protected areas have materialized into the elaboration of a corresponding legislative and institutional frame. Here we have to mention the general regulations on the environment protection (Law no. 265/2006) and/or the land-use planning (Law no. 350/2000) but also the specific regulations aiming at assigning several protected areas and adopting the corresponding management plans. Likewise, the establishment of the Ministry of Environment and of its specialized structures, and also the existence of numerous specialized NGOs in the protected areas sustain the institutional frame necessary for the system's operation.

5. Field research on trading holidays in the natural protected areas

The assignment of the protected areas is the first and most important step in the process of preserving the biodiversity and the sustainable development. However, by definition these zones are also created for the benefit of humans, therefore appears the problem of enhancing their value. Tourism plays an essential role among the complex and sustainable exploitation modalities of these areas.

A field research tried to identify the concerns and ways to exploit the protected areas through tourism.

5.1 Methodological aspects

Field research aiming at both the potential tourists and the travel agencies, the main link in trading the holiday offers, was made in order to identify the level at which tourism is practiced in the protected natural areas and consequently to stress its place among the tourists' motivations, but also the existent concerns of the tourism agencies to welcome the tourists' demands by introducing the holidays in the protected natural areas in the offers. The research was made during the project *The dynamics of the communitarian policies implementation in enhancing the value of the protected areas in Romania through the tourism and designing their integrated management architecture*. The ID-1811/2009, results will be utilized in the modernization of business travel agencies process in our country, in order to align it with European standards. *The methodology* of the investigations of the tourism agencies conforms to the standards on the field researches development and took into consideration the evaluation of their roles in trading the holidays in the natural protected areas, and the description of the results being pertinent for the present subject. *The aim of the research* was to determine the tendencies in the evolution of the tourist circulation in the natural protected areas. The *objectives* were connected to: - establishing the level of tourism practicing in the natural protected areas on the level of the tourism agencies; - stressing the way tourism agencies understand this form of tourism; - indication of eco-touristic packages which include tourism in protected areas: trips, weekends, summer camps and so on; - the hierarchy of the protected areas according to the importance in the creation of the eco-touristic offer, which include the tourism in the protected areas; - identification of the activities' typology considered attractive for the diversification of the tourist offer in the protected areas. As far as the *estimation of the obtained information value* is concerned, it was considered important in order to know the tourism agencies' perceptions on trading holidays in the natural protected areas, useful in formulating the main tendencies registered among the tenderers on the tourist market. On the *method for gathering the information*, we can say that the structured form of communication was chosen; it materialized into a questionnaire of 16 questions and the answers were registered through the technique of the interview operator, the duration for filling out the questionnaire being of approximately 10 minutes. The selection of subjects was random, respecting the requirements of the probability principles. Furthermore, the design of the information collection took into account the fact that a tourism agency was *the observation unit* and the *sampling unit* – the agency's representative, named to participate to the Tourism Fair, the community studied comprising 106 tourism agencies in Bucharest and other towns. The research took place during the Romanian Tourism Fair, on March 19-22, 2009. The number of Romanian tourism agencies is 3000 (900 in Bucharest), but only 300 have a constant activity. Therefore, we can state that the sample is representative of 95% with a margin of error of $\pm 3\%$ for the investigated agencies. Under these circumstances, the results can be extrapolated, without reservation, to the whole community and used by travel agencies in developing and diversifying their activities.

5.2 Results of information processing and interpretation

The questions concerned the specialization field of tourism agencies, the level of practice of tourism forms in protected areas, tourism in protected areas offer, their importance in creating ecotourism offer, types of activities considered attractive for diversification of ecotourism packages, agencies availability to invest in projects to promote and create holiday offers in protected areas.

For example, to the question "What is the specialization of the agency you are working in?" 104 out of 106 people answered, out of which 25 (18.94% of total responses and 24.04% of total respondents) mentioned inbound tourism, 81 (61.36 % of total responses and 77.88% of total respondents) indicated outbound tourism and 26 (19.70% of total responses and 25.00% of total respondents) domestic tourism.

For all types of tourism according to travel agencies representative's opinion (see Table 3) is that the practice level of these tourism types is low to medium (the highest mean of the responses 3.336 corresponding for cultural tourism and the lowest mean for speleological tourism 2.074), the responses are quite homogeneous, standard deviations are between 1.11 and 1.24. Regarding the level of practice of tourism forms in protected areas in the first place is cultural tourism (mean 3.336), followed by rural tourism (mean 3.000), hiking (mean 2.958), nature tourism (mean 2.908), adventure tourism (mean 2.892), ecotourism (mean 2.854), scientific tourism (mean 2.600), speleological tourism (mean 2.074). For all forms of tourism except for the scientific tourism and the speleological tourism, most common answer is the average level of practice (mode is 3.0000) with frequencies ranging from 29-39 of valid answers. For scientific tourism the mode is 2.000 (frequency 26) and for the speleological tourism the mode is 1.000 with frequency 35.

Table no. 3 Distribution indicators of representatives agencies opinion versus the forms of sustainable tourism

Variable	Responses question 2						
	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	Frecquency	Std.Dev.	Std.Error
2.1	100	3.000000	3.000000	3.000000	39	1.197641	0.119764
2.2	96	2.854167	3.000000	3.000000	30	1.142289	0.116584
2.3	93	2.892473	3.000000	3.000000	29	1.237655	0.128339
2.4	95	2.600000	2.000000	2.000000	26	1.241139	0.127338
2.5	95	3.336842	3.000000	3.000000	30	1.144929	0.117467
2.6	96	2.958333	3.000000	3.000000	35	1.113710	0.113668
2.7	98	2.908163	3.000000	3.000000	38	1.122284	0.113368
2.8	94	2.074468	2.000000	1.000000	35	1.119133	0.115430

There were analyzed responses to questions on the size and area of specialization of the agency and ecotourism packages offer that relate to holidays, tours, weekends, camps and other (Figure no. 1). The data analysis shows that only 35 (33% of the responses and respondents) from 106 agencies are developing packages that include ecotourism and tourism in protected areas. From agencies specialized in inbound tourism, 3 (3.33% of the responses and 8.57% of respondents) type micro enterprise are offering ecotourism packages in the form of holidays, circuits and weekends, 3 (3.33% of the responses and 8.57% of respondents) type small enterprise elaborate ecotourism offers, which include tourism in protected areas, as circuits and weekends, 2 (2.22% of the responses and 5.71%

of respondents) medium organizations provide ecotourism packages as weekends and large enterprises do not provide this kind of tourism.

From agencies specialized in outbound tourism, 14 (15.55% of the responses and 40.00% of respondents) micro enterprises are offering ecotourism packages in the form of holidays, circuits, weekends and school camps, 8 (8.88% of responses and 22.85% of respondents) developed as small type are offering ecotourism packages, which include tourism in protected areas in the form of holidays, tours, weekends and school camps, 3 (3.33% of the responses and 8, 57% of respondents) type medium enterprise are providing ecotourism packages in the form of holidays, tours, weekends, school camps and exotic vacations and one large company (1.11% of the responses and 2.85% of respondents) offers this type of travel only as circuits.

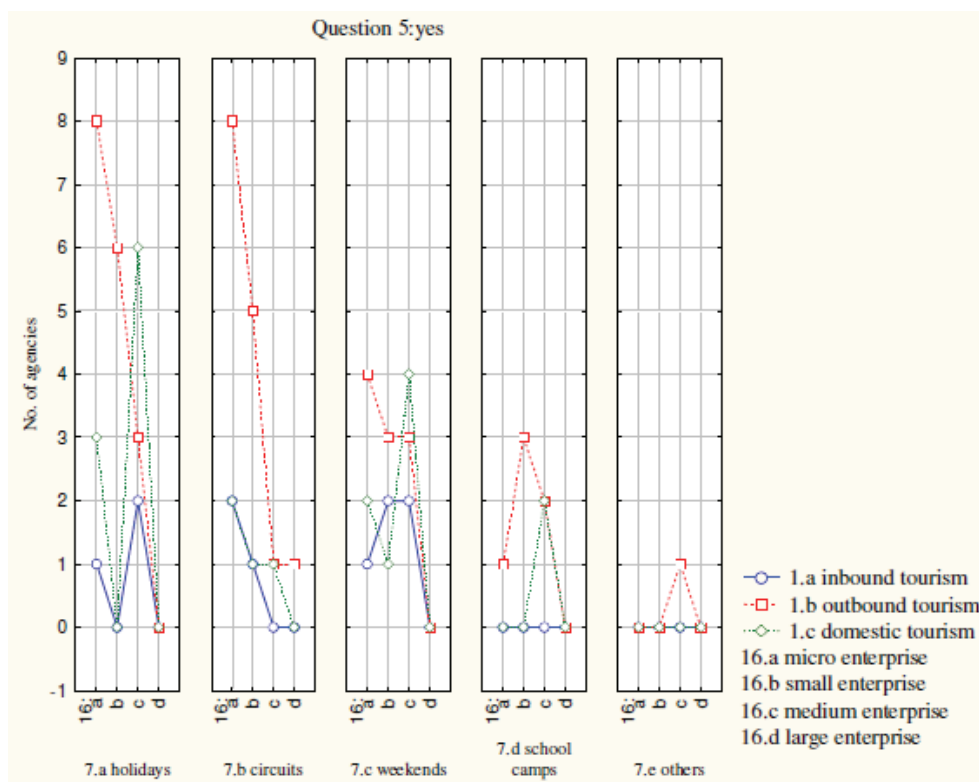


Figure no. 1: The relationship between responses regarding the size and the specialization field of the agency and the elaboration of ecotourism packages which include the tourism in protected areas

From agencies specialized in domestic tourism, 4 (4.44% of the responses and 11.42% of respondents) micro enterprises are offering ecotourism packages in the form of holidays, circuits and weekends, 2 (2.22% of the responses and 5,71% of respondents) developed as small ones are offering ecotourism packages, which include tourism in protected areas, as circuits and weekends, 6 (6.76% of the responses and 17.14% of respondents) medium organizations provide holidays, tours, weekends and school camps as ecotourism packages and large organization ones do not provide this kind of tourism. It can be concluded that

agencies, in general, produce and offer a few ecotourism packages, most of which are contained in the offer for outbound tourism and less for domestic and inbound tourism.

In terms of the degree of importance that agencies allot to protected areas in the creation of ecotourism offer, which includes tourism in protected areas, they rank as follows (Table no. 3): on the first place are biosphere reserves (mean 4.471) followed by natural sites of UNESCO universal heritage (mean 4.444), reserves and natural monuments (mean 4.232), natural parks (mean 4.174), national parks (mean 4.147), monuments and archaeological sites (mean 4.037), monument and architectural ensembles (mean 3.988), wetlands of international importance (mean 3.883), special protection areas bird (3.707 mean). Respondents granted a high degree of importance (5 and 6) for biosphere reserves, nature reserves and natural monuments and natural sites of UNESCO universal heritage (the median is higher than the mean). In terms of homogeneity of responses, on the first place are situated natural parks (std. dev. 1.535), which means that in general respondents rated the importance of the protected areas in particular rates 4 (important).

At the opposite end are the natural sites of UNESCO universal heritage (std.dev. 1.723), but is noted an mean of 4.444 and a median of 5.000 which means that respondents appreciate the relatively different degree of importance of the protected areas. There can be noted, for all protected areas a high significance degree of statistical means, as the ratio between the mean and standard error is greater than 2 (the result is significant at 95%). There is a high frequency of responses given by a high degree of importance to all protected areas (mode value is 6) except for special protection for bird areas (the mode is 3) and the reserves and natural monuments (equal number of responses for importance degrees 5 and 6).

Table no. 4. Distribution indicators of the importance degree of protected areas in the tourism offer

Variable	Responses question 8						
	Valid N	Mean	Median	Mode	Freq.	Std.Dev.	Std.Error
8.1	87	4.471264	5.000000	6.000000	29	1.583631	0.169783
8.2	88	4.147727	4.000000	6.000000	23	1.594097	0.169931
8.3	86	4.174419	4.000000	6.000000	21	1.535401	0.165567
8.4	86	4.232558	5.000000	Multiple	22	1.569372	0.169230
8.5	87	3.988506	4.000000	6.000000	21	1.573725	0.168721
8.6	81	4.037037	4.000000	6.000000	24	1.684076	0.187120
8.7	90	4.444444	5.000000	6.000000	37	1.723017	0.181622
8.8	86	3.883721	4.000000	6.000000	21	1.697185	0.183012
8.9	82	3.707317	4.000000	3.000000	18	1.629116	0.179906

From the 102 respondents 26 agencies (25.49% of responses and respondents) do not want to invest in various projects related to development and promotion of holiday offers in protected areas (Figure no. 2).

Among them: a) 12 (11.76% of responses and respondents) are micro enterprise agencies, but consider the types of activities attractive for diversification of tourism in protected areas: studying flora 6 (5.88% of responses and of respondents), recreational fishing 6 (5.88% of responses and respondents), studying of terrestrial fauna 5 (4.90% of responses and respondents), studying the fauna in the aquatic environment 4 (3.92% of the responses and of respondents), horserides in natural areas 4 (3.92% of responses and respondents),

photography and wildlife study 4 (3.92% of responses and respondents), expeditions of adventure 4 (3.92% of responses and respondents), boat trips 3 (2.94% of responses and respondents) and cycling / mountain bike 1 (0.98% of responses and respondents); b) 12 (11.76% of responses and respondents) are small enterprise agencies, but indicated attractive activities in tourism in protected areas offer's creation: the study of flora 6 (5.88% of responses and respondents), studying the fauna in the aquatic environment (4.90% of responses and respondents), photography and wildlife study 5 (4.90% of responses and respondents); c) 2 (1.96% of responses and respondents) are medium-sized enterprise agencies and propose the following activities: studying flora in the aquatic environment 1 (0.98% of responses and respondents) and fisheries (0.98% of responses and respondents); d) large tourism agencies do not identify any activities.

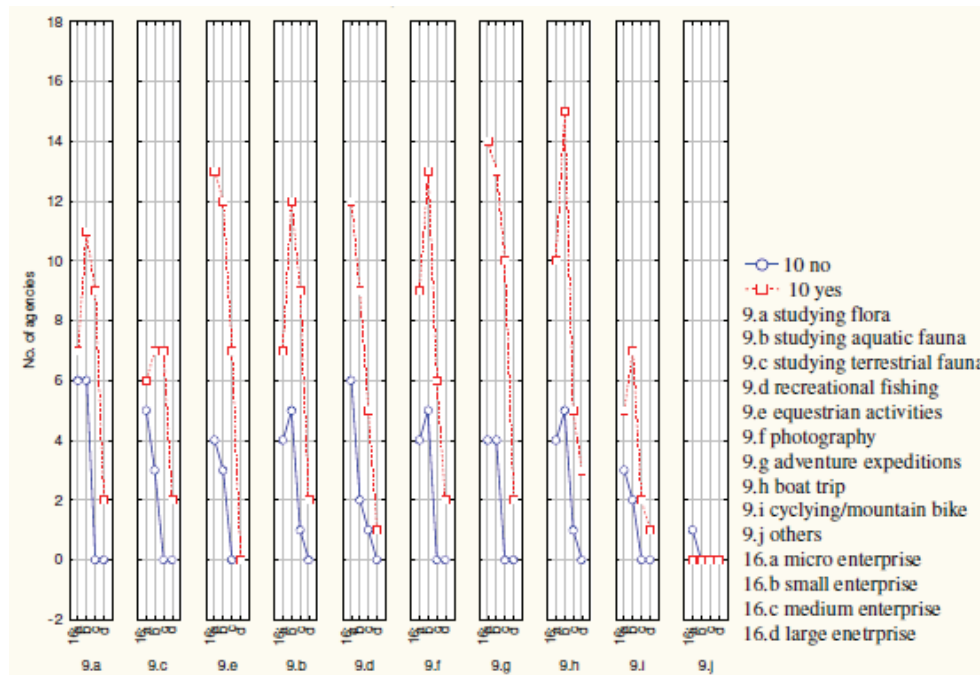


Figure no 2: The relation between the size of the agency, its intention to invest in the creation and promotion of the holidays offers in protected areas and attracted activities types in order to diversify these offers

Furthermore, 76 (74.50% of responses and respondents) agencies intend to invest in projects involving the development and promotion of tourism packages in protected areas, including: a) 27 (26.47% of the responses and respondents) are micro enterprise agencies, which consider that the types of activities for diversification of tourism in protected areas include: adventure expeditions 14 (13.72% of responses and respondents), horseback rides in natural areas 13 (12.74% of responses and respondents), fisheries 12 (11.76% of responses and respondents); b) 29 (28.43% of responses and respondents) are small enterprise agencies, but indicate as attractive activities in the creation of tourism offer in protected area boat trips 15 (14.70% of responses and respondents), adventure expeditions 13 (12.74% of responses and respondents), photography and fauna study 13 (12.74% of responses and respondents); c) 16 (15.68% of responses and respondents) are medium-sized

enterprise agencies and propose the type and activities: adventure expeditions 10 (9.80% of responses and respondents), studying the fauna in the aquatic environment 9 (8.82% of responses and respondents), studying the flora 9 (8.82% of responses and respondents); d) all large tourism agencies are willing to invest in projects that promote tourism in protected areas and propose diversification activities like: boat trips 3 (2.94% of responses and respondents), adventure expedition 2 (1.96% of responses and respondents), studying the fauna in the aquatic environment 2 (1.96% of responses and respondents).

Small and micro tourism agencies are willing to invest, more than large and medium tourism agencies, in projects related to creating and promoting holiday offers in protected areas. For offer diversification of tourism in protected areas micro, small and medium agencies consider as attractive activities adventure expeditions and equestrian activities, while large agencies consider boat trips an important activity in the creation of tourism packages in protected areas.

Conclusions

In the synthesis of the research, it can be mentioned that even if Romania has a potential of resources corresponding to the demands for creating a national, unitary and integrated system of protected areas and that efforts were made on the administrative, legislative and institutional plan, as compared to the requirements of the European Union and to the accomplishments of other countries in the Eastern Europe, the preoccupations have to be intensified in this direction. Also, the management of the protected areas represents one of the weak points of the activities, sustained by the fact that for many national and natural parks in our country either there are no management plans, or they are not yet approved or implemented. As far as the trade is concerned, research showed that the preoccupations of the tourism agencies to create several specialized offers were reduced, even if they know the benefits of the trips in the protected areas, the offer being poor or created namely at the request of the tourists (especially groups of pupils, students, young). Taking into account on the one hand the advantages of the holidays in the protected areas and on the other hand the tourists' growing interest in this type of holiday, a higher involvement of the tourism agencies and of the administrations in promoting, enhancing the value and the sustainable development of the natural protected areas is necessary for the future. In this regard, the tourism agencies must be advised and stimulated to create specific products. During this process it is of outmost importance to follow the harmonization of all the stakeholders' interests (tourism agencies, parks administrations, tourists, NGOs) ensuring the conditions for maintaining a balance between the environment conservation on the one hand and meeting the requirements of the tourists and the local communities, on the other hand.

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